The Reverend Thomas Royce Brendle

By LEONARD E. SHUPP

The Reverend Thomas R. Brendle, Pastor Emeritus of the historic Egypt Reformed Church, United Church of Christ, Egypt, Pennsylvania, and more widely known as the "Dean of the Pennsylvania German Folkorists," has returned to the Lehigh Valley.

Born with a deep and abiding love for historical research and folklore, the Reverend Mr. Brendle collected volumes and volumes of Pennsylvania German folklore. He also authored and co-authored several books.

The first of these was called "Plant Names and Plant Lore Among the Pennsylvania Germans" and was co-authored with the late David E. Lick and published as Part III, Volume XXXIII of the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, Pa. 1928.

The next was "Folk Medicine Among the Pennsylvania Germans — The Non-Occult Cures" and was co-authored with the late Claude W. Unger and published as Volume XLV of the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, Pa. 1935.

In collaboration with the late William S. (Pumpernickle Bill) Troxell, he co-authored "Pennsylvania German Folk-Tales, Legends and Once-Upon-A-Time Stories, Maxims and Sayings" This was published as Volume L of the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, Pa. 1944.

Having discovered some aged singers of Pennsylvania German folk-singers in his community, Reverend Brendle conceived the plan of recording these songs before those in whose memory they still lived passed from the scene. In this project he again collaborated with the late William S. Troxell, travelling far and wide over the eastern part of the State. One product of this enterprise was a chapter by Brendle and Troxell in the book, "Songs and Legends of Pennsylvania," edited by George Korson. (The University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pa. 1949).

Among other writings of the Reverend Mr. Brendle are: "The Flora of the Perkiomen Region;" "An Old Time School Master;" "History of the Falkner Swamp Reformed Church;" "History of the Old Skippack Reformed Church;" plus about 25 contributions and papers relative to the History of the Reformed Congregation at Egypt, Pa. More recently the Reverend Mr. Brendle wrote "Moses Dissinger, Evangelist and Patriot." This book was published as part of Volume 58 of the Proceedings of the Pennsylvania German Society, Norristown, Pa. 1959.

The varied contributions of Reverend Thomas Royce Brendle to the study of the life, lore and culture of the Pennsylvania Germans are undoubtedly well known to most readers of The Eck. Frequently called "America's foremost collector of folklore," no one interested in Pennsylvania German folklore can ignore the "significant folkloristic studies made by him."

Brendle also made significant contributions in the field of the Pennsylvania German plays. His first play was "Die Mutter." The late Dr. Harry Hess Reichard said of this play: "Brendle uses the stage to teach his people the traditions of their ancestors, and by implications he exhorts his flock to follow in their train. Brendle's 'Mutter' is his conception of the ideal moderately well - to - do Pennsylvania German Mother." Brendle's second play "Die Hoffning," is a war play and is his answer to the question: What was the typical Pennsylvania German's attitude toward the First World War

Source from which these books and plays have been drawn, is one of the finest and most complete private collections and library of old volumes, hand - written and typed notes, pamphlets, books, booklets and clippings, in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country.

Only recently Reverend Brendle contributed much of his library and collection to Historic Schaefferstown, Inc. where it will be permanently and securely housed, and will be known as "The Reverend Thomas Royce Brendle Memorial Collection." The heart of this collection is over 40,000 separate items of Pennsylvania German folklore, proverbs, sayings and human interest stories. These have been crowded into seventy-five spring - bound volumes.

In this connection Thomas Brendle said, "During the early years of my Ministry, particularly in the land of the Pennsylvania Germans, I had an inner feeling that much of the folklore would be lost forever among the sands of time, unless they were recorded. With this in mind, early in 1936, I started to hand record, in note - book form, every dialect proverb, every dialect folklore saying and every dialect human interest story I heard in my daily contact with people of all ages."

As a pastor, neighbor and friend, it was said of Rev. Thomas Brendle, that he always lived close to his people, sharing their joys and their sorrows. Dr. Reichard said, "he seemed to have a peculiar faculty for cooperative research, as an eager student of folkways and folklore."

The William S. Troxell Collection, which Mrs. Troxell turned over to the Reverend Mr. Brendle upon the death of her husband, has been deposited in the Archives of the Fackenthal Library, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa., where it is known as the Troxell-Brendle Collection.

No record of the many and varied accomplishments of Thomas Brendle would be complete without mentioning his beloved wife, Mrs. Anna Sarah Brendle, who has been his constant companion and helpmate for fifty-five years of married life. Mrs. Brendle once said of her famous husband, "He is a better collector than he is a cleaner; after we got married, I didn't have time for anything but to dust books!"

This, however, is not entirely correct. She did become the mother of three children. Mary Gretchen was born April 3, 1912, at Abilene, Kansas; Helen Gertrude was born Jan. 26, 1915 at Sumneytown, Pa.; and Thomas Abraham, was born at Green Lane, Pa. August 31, 1921.

Mrs. Brendle was born in Myerstown, Pa. the only child of the late Frank and Mary (nee Kilmer) Schwartz. She was a member of the historically famous Tuplehocken Church in the Lebanon Valley. She attended the public schools in Myerstown and later attended Millersville State Teachers College. It was while at Albright College, Reading, Pa., where she took special courses in teacher training, that she met Thomas Brendle.

The Reverend Thomas Royce Brendle was born September 15, 1889 in the "old Steinmetz home" at Schaefferstown, Lebanon County, Pa., the son of the late Thomas Steinmetz Brendle and his wife, the late Mary (nee Bomberger) Brendle. Here, and in neighboring Lebanon, he spent his youth and early school years. After graduation from Schaefferstown High School, he entered Albright College, Reading, Pa. as a freshman in the year 1904. After three years at Albright College, he matriculated at Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. in his senior year and was graduated in the year 1908. He entered the Eastern Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pa. and was graduated from there in the year 1911. Following graduation he was licensed to preach by the Lebanon Classis of the Reformed Church in May of 1911. On May 30, 1911 Reverend and Mrs. Brendle were united in marriage by the late Reverend Daniel D. Brendle, brother of Reverend Brendle, and the late Reverend F. R. Shafer. He was called to Abilene, Kansas where he was ordained into the Christian Ministry on June 4, 1911 by the late Reverend Dr. John C. Horning and the late Reverend Ward Hartman. At Abilene he preached two years at a Mission Church under the aegis of the Home Mission Board.

On July 28, 1913 he was installed as pastor of the historic Old Goshenhoppen Charge, in the Perkiomen Valley. He was installed by the late Rev. Dr. Snyder, the late Rev. D. D. Brendle and the late Rev. Harry C. Kehm. This was a three - church charge, comprising Sumneytown, Keller's and Old Goshenhoppen. While there he became the Editor of the Historical and Scientific Society of the Perkiomen Valley, publishers of the "Perkiomen Region" for the first four years of it's existence. Although it is not commonly known, Thomas Brendle served as a substitute teacher during World War I, when there was an acute shortage of school teachers. He served the Old Goshenhoppen charge for a total of 13 years, from 1913 to 1926.

In the year 1926 he accepted a call to the historic Egypt Reformed Church. This was also a three - church charge comprising Egypt, Laury's and Cementon. He was installed at Egypt, April 18, 1926 by the late Rev. Robert M. Kern, the late Rev. Jacob Landis and the late Elder Jeremiah S. Troxell. He served the Egypt Charge for thirty-five years, from 1926 to 1961, and in total, served as an active Minister of the Reformed Church for fifty years.

On January 22, 1961, the Reverend Mr. Brendle submitted his letter of resignation to a special meeting of the Joint Consistories of the Egypt Charge. He preached his Farewell Sermon at Egypt, Sunday, May 26, 1961.

The Reverend and Mrs. Brendle moved to Hamburg, New York in June of 1961 and lived there at 19 Oakland Place, for five years, until March 25, 1966, when they returned to their beloved Lehigh Valley, and moved into an apartment at 1104 Hamilton Street, Allentown, Pa.

No biographical sketch of Rev. Thomas Brendle would be complete without mentioning that in 1934 he was one of the original thirteen "rawd" members who started the famous "Grundsow Lodge Nummer Ains on da Lechaw."

For many years Rev. Thomas Brendle served as Secretary of the Pennsylvania German Society and is now honored by that Society as Secretary - Emeritus.

Wann Die Maemm Hot Dokter G'schpielt

Wann eens vun uns net gut hot gfiehlt,
Do hot die Maemm als Dokter g'schpielt.
Was waar sie doch so lieb un gut,
Hot glei gewisst was helfe dut.

Un hen mer uns mol weh geduh,
Dann kummt sie glei un frogt uns, "Wu?—
Heeli, heeli, Hinkeldreck!
Bis maerrye frieh iss alles weck;"

So hot sie als beim Blose gsaat,
Ya, des hot gholfe, immer graad.
Un wann aa ebbes Schlimmers waar,
Mer waare nie net lang in gfaahr.

Nau des waar immer so ihr Weg,
Sie hot ihr eegni Apodhek;
Do waare Tee vun yedre Satt
Un alle Sadde Waerzel datt.

Mer braucht yuscht uff der Schpeicher geh,
Do waar mol erscht der Salwei-Tee,
Un Schlangewaerzel, Edarn-Tee,
Brunellegraut un was noch meh.

Un Groddebalsem, Hollerblieht,
Vun dem hot sie uns oft gebrieht.
Es macht nix aus was eens hot ghatt,
'S waar immer ebbes hot gebatt.

Im Friehyaahr, mit em schlechte Blut,
Fer des waar Sassafrass so gut;
Un Sulphur mit Molassich — O!
Der Gschmack, der geht eem heit noch noh!

Un hot mer's Gift im Summer grickt —
Des hot gebisse un gezwickt!
Mit Seiohrbletter, siesser Raahm,
Do waare glei die Schmaerze zaahm.

Im Winder mit verfrorne Fiess,
Do waar eem's Lewe net so siess;
Baarfiessich in der Schnee geyaagt,
Mer hen uns net emol beglaagt.
Un's Kalt des setzt sich uff die Bruscht,
Was hen mer in de Roi rum ghuscht!
Fer sell waar Daerbedien un Schmals,
En wollner Schtrump fer um der Hals.

Noh heilt en aagewaxe Kind,
Dem kann sie helfe zimmlich gschwind;
Des schmiert sie yuscht mit Gensfett ei,
Dann iss der Druwwel ball verbei.

Die Reedle hen uns gaar nix gschatt,
Hen net emol der Dokter ghatt;
Do hot sie Hollerbliet gekocht,
Sell hot sie awwer raus gebrocht!

Dann waare lose Millichzaeh,
Waer wott dann do zum Dokter geh?
Die hot sie gschlippt mit schtaerryer Neez
Un raus gezoppt — die Maemm verschteht's.

Am schlimmschte waar des Castoreil!
Des meen ich heit noch waer fer Geil;
Doch hen mer immer besser gfiehlt,
Wann mol die Maemm hot Dokter gschpielt.

—John Birmelin